Tacoma Historical Society

City of Destiny Newsletter

www.TacomaHistory.org

Donation $2

FALL 2020 Tacoma, Washington

2020 Honors Awarded by Tacoma Historical Society

Recognition accorded to THS members

Bill Baarsma (r) with THS Vice President Dale Wirsing

Former Tacoma Mayor Bill Baarsma and historic preservation advocate Marshall McClintock were honored on September 14, 2020, by Tacoma Historical Society for their roles in presenting and conserving the city's history.

The presentations were made at the society's 30th anniversary meeting, conducted virtually.

Bill Baarsma received the society's 2020 **Murray Morgan Award** for significant efforts to preserve and communicate local history. The award particularly noted Baarsma's long record of advocacy in behalf of the history of his native city. He has guided the society through many terms as president.

Murray Morgan (1916-2000) was a preeminent Northwest historian, author and journalist. The award has been presented annually since 1992.

The society's annual **Alan C. Liddle Award**, which recognizes historic preservation efforts and advocacy, was presented to **Marshall McClintock**. The award's name honors a Tacoma architect and civic leader who died in 2009.

This year the society established a third major award to recognize exceptional efforts by volunteers, and it has been named for the late Ronald E. Magden, historian and educator who died in 2018 at age 92.

The inaugural **Ronald Magden Award** was

Marshall McClintock

presented to **Ed and Rose Mattison**, mainstays in the society's annual Historic Homes of Tacoma Tour. This award has been created to recognize outstanding work and dedication on the part of THS volunteers.

Ed and Rose Mattison

You can view the award presentations, which occurred at the beginning of the society's September virtual meeting, at

www.tiny.cc/THSawards2020

Inside ...

A 1914 Nightmare ..... Page 3
Bogged down in Bankruptcy (part two) ..... Page 4
Aviator Gustav Stromer and Actress Jane O'Roark ..... Page 6
Eyes of the Totem Watch Party & Auction Fundraiser ..... Page 10
History & Historic Preservation: Upcoming Programs ..... Page 12

Brought to you with the support of Tacoma Creates and THS members; operation funding also provided by Humanities Washington as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

TACOMA CREATES

Keeping History Alive

By Bill Baarsma, President of the Board

We consider our archives to be a collection of priceless Tacoma treasures — many times saved at the last minute from trips to the landfill. On occasion, we are surprised and delighted at what we find. Case in point:

A few months back David Harshman, the son of the late legendary basketball Coach Marv Harshman, asked me to look over some of his father's scrapbooks, correspondence, and other documents to see if THS might be interested in having them donated for our collection. I was particularly interested in information about Marv's tenure at Pacific Lutheran University — when he served as the basketball coach and during his time as a student and All-American athlete. There was a treasure trove of material about Marv — all donated by David. Then something unusual caught my eye — a packet of articles about PLU alum and former basketball player Lute Jerstad, one of the first Americans to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

The articles chronicled Lute's ascent and the challenges confronting the climbing team. But, also in the packet were two hand written letters from Jerstad to his Coach, Marv Harshman. The letters were written while Jerstad was on the slopes of Everest and describe in detail the challenges facing the climbers. The letters are priceless, and we thank David for them.

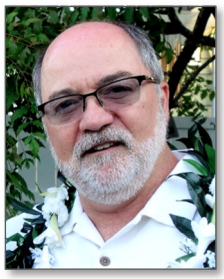
I plan to write a more detailed description of Lute's experiences for a future newsletter. Suffice to say, it is your financial support of THS that makes this all possible. I thank you.

Historically Speaking ...

From Michael Lafreniere, THS Director

Since our last edition, the world has continued its spinning, dull and sometimes uproarious whirlwind of change. For THS, it has meant a series of challenges and being part of that whirlwind.

This past spring we began another search for an alternative locations. With a new sense of urgency driven by both internal and external factors, a new home for THS was found. Thus began yet another challenge — actually moving. Yikes.



It was a process that took nearly three months … in the middle of a pandemic. Moving a collection of over 10,000 items (many of them extremely delicate and fragile) to an entirely new and different location is no simple task. Through the determined efforts on the part of THS staff and volunteers, and with your support, the move went smoothly and we're now settling in. Which leads to my invitation.

We have reopened with the "Bank on Tacoma" exhibit, which had been abruptly closed due to the pandemic. We've made the sorts of operational of changes called for in the Governor's protocols for museums. We have an amazing space with great potential for storytelling that we're proud to show you. You're invited to visit!

So please stop by soon per our temporary open schedule, or you can make arrangements with our office to schedule a Saturday visit.

Be well. Make history.

"Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored."

- author Aldous Huxley

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Published by

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Original articles about Tacoma history are invited.

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A 1914 Nightmare

By Russell Holter (THS member and author)

Reprinted with permission. Originally published by Holter, Russell H. "A 1914 Nightmare." Tall Timbers Short Lines, Number 59, April 1999; Pacific Coast Logging Historical and Technical Society, Tacoma, WA.

The day was typical of a summer Friday. Children played in the streets as the men of the Bismarck Lumber Mill toiled hard in the sweat and sawdust filled environment. Finally, during the hottest part of the day, the plant whistle blew, signaling the end of a week's work. For the family men, it was time to go home and rest. For the bachelors, it was time to go downtown and raise Cain.

Meanwhile Tacoma Eastern engineer Joe Kemp and his fireman Leonard Cass were preparing engine No. 14 for duty at the Tacoma yards near City Waterway. Kemp and his train crew had some switching to do before the arrival of the Lakes District job from Kapowsin, which was due at Bismarck in a few hours. Upon the train's arrival, the No. 14 would be pressed to bring the heavy train of logs, lumber, and coal down the steep Tacoma Eastern gulch to the Northern Pacific interchange in Tacoma.

It was a beautiful summer evening in the Pacific Northwest. At 6 o'clock, the sun would not set for several hours. The smells of wholesome home cooking shared the air with the incessant banter of children. The nightwatchman recorded his entry for July 10, 1914: 78 degrees and clear in Bismarck with a stirring breeze out of the North. An old wives' tale states that a north wind is a signal that a change was forthcoming, and in a few short hours, it was going to get a whole lot hotter.

Adjacent to the expansive Bismarck Lumber Company was the smaller Comly-Kirk mill, about an acre in size. John Crowell, the nightwatchman, was making his rounds when he noticed a fire about "the size of a man's hat" burning inside the company dry kiln. He ran to the boiler room to sound the alarm: one prolonged blast followed by four short ones. By the time he had given 15 shrill blasts on the factory whistle, the fire had engulfed the dry kiln. It was spreading uphill, driven by a brisk summer breeze toward the more massive Bismarck Lumber Mill.

A young Paul Kirk was at home at 5219 McKinley Avenue when he heard the whistle blow. He dashed outside to see smoke rising from his father's mill. He jumped on his bike and raced toward the mill. The fire, fed by dry timbers and sawdust, quickly leaped over the fence that separated the Comly-Kirk Mill from the more extensive Bismarck operation. Crowell, the night watchman, looking on in fear, tied the whistle cord down in the fully open position. He then hastened to prepare a firehose. By now, the boiler room was involved on three sides, including the roof. Realizing his danger, Crowell attempted to climb a set of stairs to the second floor. The stairwell collapsed under his weight, and Crowell landed in burning debris on the boiler room floor. Overcome from the heat, and now suffering from an injury to his right hip, the watchman crawled for his life toward the daylight. He had to be led out of the facility by J. E. Weaver, a Bismarck Lumber Mill employee who was first to arrive upon hearing the whistle blasts. As soon as Crowell reached safety, the men were turned on their heels by the sound of the boiler room roof collapsing.

With bell clanging and smoke billowing from its stack, the first fire engine arrived (pulled by three grey horses), a fast run from the station at South 38th Street and McKinley Avenue. Men fighting the fire with buckets attempted to keep the flames contained while the engine crew tried to get water pressure to douse the fire. Immediately it was evident that more help was needed. However, it would be sometime before reinforcements from the Tacoma Brigades could get there. Horse-drawn steam pumpers raced from all the stations in the south end of Tacoma. Some came from as far away as five miles. Many of the horses fell exhausted when they arrived at the scene. Newer, motor-driven fire apparatus also began roaring in from downtown Tacoma. By now, escaping water began to run in the parched ditches near the mills and along the railroad tracks.

Rescuers managed to free all the horses from the Comly-Kirk Mill stables as the fire spread to the structure's roof. Drawn by the noise, smoke, and flame, a crowd of the curious watched in amazement, as man attempted to do battle with nature. Every able-bodied man was put to task with whatever tool was available; hose, bucket, shovel, or ax. But the valiant efforts could not keep the flames from spreading to plant owner T. E. Comly's residence. The noise and flames panicked the mill horses, which bolted back into the flaming stables where they perished in agony.

News of the fire spread just as rapidly. The blaze could be seen for miles in all directions. The Tacoma Railway and Power Company placed extra streetcars on the McKinley Line to transport hundreds of spectators to the conflagration at a nickel apiece.

A call went out to the Tacoma Eastern Railroad to pull cars from the doomed Bismarck Lumber mill. The only locomotive that was ready was Joe Kemp's engine. Kemp was given orders to run up the hill and pull as many cars out of the path of the flames as possible. Sixteen Tacoma Eastern cars were at stake, not to mention the value of the lading. Tacoma Eastern

(Continued on page 8)

Bogged Down in Bankruptcy (Part 2)

By Deb Freedman, THS Volunteer

Part One of this story was featured in the THS Summer 2020 Edition.

Troubled Times

On May 5, 1893, when Black Friday tipped the nation into financial chaos, [George] Boggs was on thirty days' leave, visiting his old home in the Midwest. The leave had been granted in April at the first council meeting held in the new city hall. In April voters also approved an additional two million dollars in bond sales. Revenues would fund purchase of the Wright waterworks, plus $330,000 in working capital, plus $100,000 for a new bridge across the tide flats. The move brought the city to the brink of its constitutional debt limit, determined by a ratio to property values.

The city council authorized Boggs to accept city warrants in lieu of cash payments for property taxes, regardless of issue order. In a burst of creative bookkeeping, Boggs stamped them unpaid for lack of funds and deposited them in local banks, receiving city credit as if he had deposited cash. He in effect deposited canceled checks as IOUs.

In August the Northern Pacific Railroad went into receivership and businesses began slashing salaries. By September Boggs was paying teachers partially with 8% warrants. Apparently oblivious to the financial downturn, Tacoma's city council pushed forward with construction contracts for the new bridge.

Meanwhile banks in Tacoma were failing with alarming regularity, like balloons dropping after a party. Without modern deposit insurance programs, investors lost their funds. In March of 1894 Boggs presented a detailed report to the council, breaking down all city deposits in a long list of local banks. By June the city had deposits of $136,000 in four suspended banks. Due to tumbling property values, city debt exceeded legal limits.

GEORGE W. BOGGS.

Changing of the Guard

Boggs was not eligible for re-election in April of 1894, but still had influence. The new Populist Party split the Democratic vote, and Republicans won by a landslide. James McCauley became the new City Treasurer, reportedly hand-picked by Boggs. Ed Orr, who had been managing the Boggs mining properties, was elected Mayor. It wasn't a smooth transition. The council was deadlocked for months, taking over 200 ballots to choose a president. In the interim, city finances ground to a screeching halt. McCauley didn't take over as treasurer until June.

Boggs moved on, recognizing that the Pacific Northwest's future was in natural resources. By the end of the decade lumber and shingles would dominate the economy. Boggs bought a gold mine near the California/Oregon border in September of 1894, then another in Baker City, Oregon, in October.

The Beginning of the End

Boggs was arrested on November 8, 1894, charged with embezzling $24,000 and "balancing his books by depositing worthless securities." However, on December 3rd the city treasurer transfer report was completed. The city had spent over $1000 for five months' of scrutiny of over 140,000 entries from April of 1892 to

(Continued on page 5)

1913 currency, from the Tacoma Historical Society Collection

Bogged Down in Bankruptcy

(Continued from page 4)

April of 1894. The Boggs accounts balanced to the penny. His case went to trial, but was quickly dismissed for insufficient evidence. Boggs went to California to look after his mining interests, leaving his family in Tacoma.

Tacoma banks were still in chaos. In May of 1894 the State Savings Bank had failed. The receiver later noticed that over $5,600 had been added to city deposits, called an "assessment for campaign expenses." As Bruce Ramsey noted in his book on the 1893 Banking Panic, "A century later, investor Warren Buffett will say, 'Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked.'" Boggs had been enjoying an open line of personal credit with unlimited overdraft privileges. In addition, interest on city deposits had been added to his personal account. Boggs later denied any knowledge of the bank's practices, but it would be his downfall, perhaps similar to Al Capone's later conviction for tax evasion.

Boggs was again arrested in October of 1895. He was found guilty on December 18th and the following week was sentenced to six years in the state penitentiary at Walla Walla.

Pending appeals, Boggs was released on bail in June of 1896. In January of 1897 Governor McGraw refused to grant a pardon, noting that elected officials should be held to a higher standard. Boggs testified in several warrant cases during the spring, but in June of 1897 Sheriff Mills accompanied Boggs to Walla Walla.

Mary Ella remained in Tacoma and supported her four children by working as a dressmaker. She put the family furniture in storage and moved into a small rented home. The *Tacoma Ledger* provided a newspaper delivery job for her eldest son.

Return to Tacoma

At the very end of 1898 Boggs returned to Tacoma to testify in more warrant cases. He spent several months preparing detailed reports for use in pending bank trials. Although technically still a prisoner, he was allowed to live with his family. Public sentiment changed, and Boggs was somehow popular again, mostly viewed as a scapegoat. Former critics stepped up to advocate for his pardon.

After Governor Rogers also denied a pardon, Boggs' legal team chose a different tack. Their efforts resulted in a new law creating a parole system, similar to one already in place in the state of Michigan. First-time offenders who had served at least one year of their sentence, had been convicted of charges less than murder, who had broken no prison rules and had a job waiting, could be found eligible for parole. Senator Ed Hamilton agreed to personally monitor Boggs, who was granted parole in June of 1899. One month later both Boggs and his wife both filed for personal bankruptcy, relieving them of all debts and liabilities.

Another Downfall

Boggs lived in Tacoma for nearly another decade, while heavily involved in mining in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. His eldest son, Raymond, earned a metallurgy and engineering degree from Yale in 1908. Another son, Ralph, drowned in a bridge construction accident near Spokane in May of 1912.

The Boggs narrative went from bad to worse. He was arrested in April of 1913 for writing several hundred dollars' worth of bad checks in Portland, Oregon. He sat in jail in Vancouver, B.C., for several months before being extradited to Portland. Arraigned in June of 1913, Boggs spent the next four months in jail awaiting trial, all the while offering to make restitution for what he claimed was a simple bookkeeping error.

On October 28, 1913, Boggs was admitted to the Multnomah Hospital, where he died two days later. Not a single newspaper mention has been found reporting his death, other than a small notice in the *Oregonian* in July of 1914 when his indictment was dismissed. For an infamous man whose name once appeared in newspapers across the state dozens of times each day, it seems an ignoble ending.

His widow Mary Ella lived in McMinnville, Oregon in 1920, working as a practitioner of Christian Science from her home. In 1930 she lived in Los Angeles and worked as a private family nurse. She died there in 1938. Her daughter Lura married Floyd Wilson in Tacoma in 1908 and died in Seattle in 1932. Lura's surviving brothers both died in California.

Retired from the Tacoma Public Library, author Deb Freedman is a former board member and longtime volunteer for THS. A thorough researcher, she also guided the production of the "Twenty-One Tales" series of books published by THS Press and the Bank on Tacoma exhibit.

"Bank on Tacoma: 1873-1993"

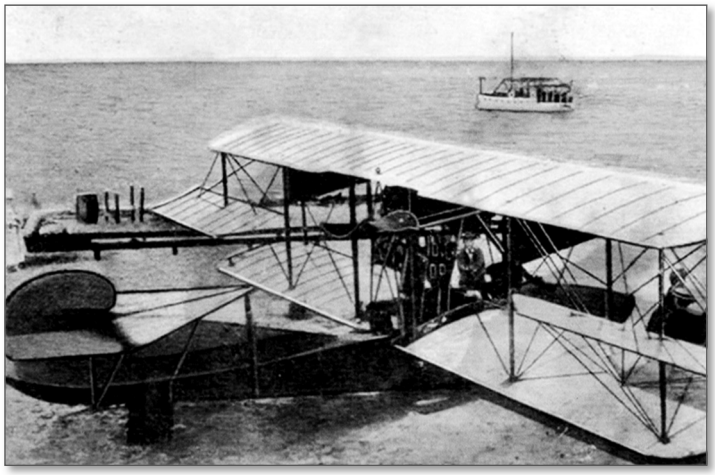
Celebrating Tacoma's rich banking history and unique financial challenges. Companion book by Deb Freedman available on Amazon and at the Tacoma Historical Society Museum 406 Tacoma Avenue S. www.TacomaHistory.org (253) 472-3738

Exhibit also online at www.tiny.cc/BankOnTacoma

Gustav Stromer and Jane O'Roark make the first airmail delivery between Tacoma and Seattle on February 20, 1915.

By Lane Morgan (from HistoryLink.org)

On February 20, 1915, at 10 a.m. on a chilly Saturday, a "hydroaeroplane" taxis along Tacoma's Middle Waterway. It carries its builder and pilot, Gustav Stromer; an actress named Jane O'Roark; and a bag containing several dozen letters canceled with the custom-made postmark "Aeroplane Mail." Twenty-seven minutes later, the plane and cargo land in Elliott Bay. O'Roark gets a ride to shore and another ride to the



Seattle post office, where she completes the first airmail delivery between the two cities. She gets back to Tacoma, by car, in time for her matinée performance at Tacoma's Empress Theater. Both Stromer and O' Roark will leave town soon thereafter, and the promised regular airmail route will not materialize until the 1920s.

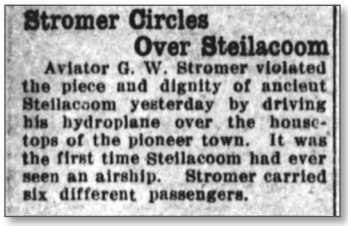
Flying for Fame

Gustav Stromer began building airplanes in Washington around 1912. (His given names also appear in the record as "Gustave" or "George W.," and the last name is sometimes spelled "Strohmer," including in the special cancellation mark on the airmail he carried, apparently a spelling error). By 1914 he had a workshop on Day Island, at the south end of the Tacoma Narrows in what is now the city of University Place. He barnstormed local events, took passengers for sightseeing spins, and promoted aviation any way he could think of. In early January 1915 Stromer met Jane O'Roark, who also had a collection of names including Emile Rorke, Emma Roark, Jane Gray, and "the Theda Bara of dramatic stock" ("Former Oakland Actress ..."). On morning of the 13th, he made her the first woman to see Tacoma from the air, an excursion undertaken to the well-publicized dismay of Charles Richards, the manager of the Empress Theater on Pacific Avenue, where O'Roark was starring that day. Despite the discomfort of an open cockpit in January with no more than a red sweater and a wool hat for warmth, she had a great time.

O'Roark and Stromer decided to fly to Seattle next, and got permission to carry the U.S. mail, including a letter from Mayor Angelo Fawcett (1846-1928) of Tacoma to his Seattle counterpart Hiram Gill (1866-1919). To increase the publicity value of the flight, they arranged for Jack Haswell, a Tacoma car dealer, to race them to Seattle in a red Maxwell speedster. On the appointed day, Saturday, February 20, 1915, the flight itself was uneventful:

"The hydroaeroplane rose through light fog, crossed Brown's Point and straightened out over East Passage, following the steamer route to Seattle. The plane caught and passed the steamer *Indianapolis* off Poverty Bay, skirted Three Tree Point and West Seattle in patchy fog, and prepared for a landing in Elliott Bay off Colman Dock about 10:24".

However, the landing was delayed by the chop kicked up by the SS *Kennedy* as it steamed out on the way to Victoria, B.C., and when Stromer did bring the plane down, the splash soaked him and O'Roark and killed the motor. Instead of an elegant disembarkation at Colman Dock, O'Roark and Stromer drifted for about 15 minutes before she got a ride from a passing rowboat and clambered out at Pier 1. She hitched a ride to the post office and got there just as Haswell pulled up in the Maxwell after a 46-minute sprint at close to 60 miles per hour.



Stromer Circles Over Steilacoom

Aviator G. W. Stromer violated the piece and dignity of ancient Steilacoom yesterday by driving his hydroplane over the house-tops of the pioneer town. It was the first time Steilacoom had ever seen an airship. Stromer carried six different passengers.

Tacoma Times, March 8, 1915

A Dramatic Life

The Seattle Star described O'Roark on arrival as "blue lipped, shivering and wet to the skin, but not as peevish as one might expect of the artistic temperament" ("Actress Travels in Clouds"). After she made her delivery, Haswell drove her back to Tacoma in time for her double role in the Jack Lait (1883-1954) play *Help Wanted* at the Empress. She played both a stenographer who was lusted after by her wealthy employer and the roue's long-suffering wife.

O'Roark's real life had its own drama. She was in Tacoma in part to put distance between herself and a scandalous bankruptcy filing in Los Angeles. She had

(Continued on page 11)

FLY TO SEATTLE? ONLY COSTS 25 IRON BOYS

Want to make a quick little trip to Seattle?

You can get there in 40 minutes, by the latest mode of travel.

Aviator G. W. Stromer, the Tacoma airship builder who has had such unusual luck recently, is going to start a regular passenger service between the two cities.

Through his manager, L. P. Martin, the aviator has arranged to commence his schedule Saturday morning at 10 o'clock, and he will continue it as long as there are persons who desire to ride.

The fare will be only $25, according to Martin. Stromer can make to trip at a rate of 73 miles per hour, after gaining his altitude, and can easily arrive at Seattle 40 minutes after leaving Tacoma. He will follow the water, but jump over points and islands. Stromer will leave Tacoma by the middle waterway. His Seattle landing will be at a dock at the foot of Washington street.

Tacoma Times, February 17, 1915, pg 2

It is worth noting that, after adjusting for inflation, $25 in 1915 was the equivalent of $644 today.

This may explain why Stromer's passenger service business was not a success, though previous news reports likely did not help Stromer.

AVIATOR STROMER HAS A CLOSE CALL FROM DEATH

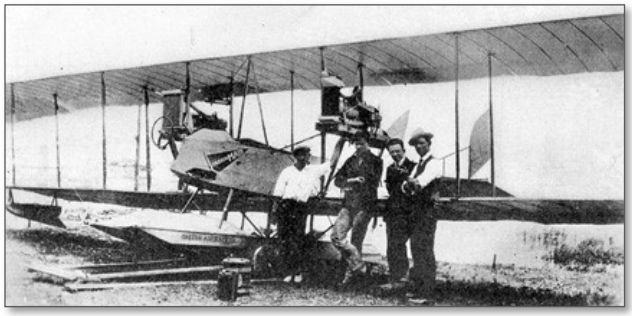
Turning a complete somersault in making a landing near the Tacoma Yacht club on the tideflats Guy Stromer, amateur aviator, had a narrow escape from death this morning following a long flight from South Tacoma to this city this morning at 10:30. Stromer left South Tacoma at 10:15, making three or four circles about the city before essaying a landing on the tideflats. At a heighth of 300 feet he dipped his plane toward the ground and just as he hit the earth his machine made a complete loop, hurling Stromer from his seat and burying him underneath the machine. Hundreds of people from the Tacoma High bridge who were watching the flight expected to see Stromer dead. In a few minutes, however, Stromer pulled himself from beneath the aeroplane, practically unhurt. The machine was slightly damaged.

Stromer will return to South Tacoma after repairing his machine.

Stromer's machine was badly shaken up but an effort will be made to have it repaired so that a return trip can be made this evening. The propeller was totally ruined and one wing suffered considerable damage. Stromer estimated that the damage will not amount to more than $50. In trying to light the small wheels sank deep into the soft sand and the sudden stop shot the aviator out of his seat and stuck his head through the top plane of the machine.

At the time of the accident a new type of hydro-aeroplane was being assembled on the tideflats not more than 100 yards away. The new hydro-aeroplane was built by Stromer for V. E. Levanway.

Tacoma Times, June 25, 1914, pg 1



AVIATOR STROMER PLANS TO FLY UPSIDE DOWN AND COME TO EARTH THAT WAY

Flying upside down has become common to readers of aviation news.

But George W. Stromer, intrepid Tacoma aviator, proposes now to fly upside down and to come to earth upside down, also. It is a feat never before accomplished, according to Stromer.

The aviator, who moved his latest model hydroplane to Day island a month ago, and who recently made arrangements to organize an aerial squad of the state militia, is ready to demonstrate his machine. He will give flying demonstrations tomorrow, Saturday and Sunday at Day island, and will carry passengers. Persons may engage passage by applying at Stromer's headquarters, Donnelly hotel.

Stromer will endeavor to come to earth upside down in his demonstrations. He has wheels on top and bottom of the machine, for landing, and declares that there is no reason why he cannot come down bottom-up as well as fly that way.

Tacoma Times, January 21, 1915, pg 2

Stromer over Chehalis

Chehalis Bee-Nugget, July 10, 1914

A 1914 Nightmare

(Continued from page 3)

employees Melvin O. Kongsli, Clayton Hilligoss, W. A. Mannor, George Soule, and C. A. Wescott all volunteered to make the trip and assist in any way they could. As the cab filled, others (who were eager to help in any way they could) also climbed aboard. Several men rode the pilot of the locomotive; the rest stood on the back footboard of the #14's tender. Kemp bellowed, "Come on you guys, railroad employees only on the lokey." The men would not be convinced, and they knew that Kemp would not put up a fight when there was a much bigger issue at stake.

One of the men on the engine was Earl Carpenter. Carpenter was an inspector for the Tacoma Railway and Power Company, who had received orders from his boss to get to Bismarck as soon as possible to make an inspection of potential fire damage to the trolley line and report back by 9:30. The Tacoma Railway and Power Company line ran up D Street from downtown Tacoma to McKinley Avenue and past the mills at South 57th and 58th Streets. For safety purposes, Dispatchers for the Tacoma Railway and Power Company had ordered streetcars halted short of the Bismarck stop until Carpenter could assess the risks of running streetcars near the fire. Knowing that the Tacoma Eastern would arrive at the scene first and not have to dodge traffic, Carpenter elected to ride the locomotive up through the gulch instead of the streetcar.

Climbing aboard the back footboard of the tender was a teen who was new to this area. He was not well known, but we know that he was staying with family members in a house that overlooked the bustling Commencement Bay near the railroad tracks. His name was Glencel Gabriel, and he was looking for something to do.

Giving the nod to fireman Cass, Kemp hauled the throttle back hard on the No. 14 and proceeded up the Tacoma Eastern Gulch. Kemp knew that time was of the essence, but he also had nearly a dozen stragglers and their safety to consider. Kemp exercised his judgment on how fast to negotiate the two and a half mile mountainous grade to the burning mill site. As he rounded the last corner near 50th street, the enormity of the blaze came into full view. Smoke and steam billowed high in the sky, and columns of flame danced violently with spectacular effect.

Kemp slowed his locomotive as he approached the flames, which now had breached the Tacoma Eastern mainline and was burning on both sides of the rails. To the east (on Cass' side of the engine) were the two mills and nearly ten acres of burning logs and timber. On Kemp's side of the locomotive burned piles of edgings, mill ends, and sawdust. Kemp had to make a decision, run the gauntlet of fire or resign himself to the fact that all was lost. The rails began to buckle as the ties caught fire. If he were to go, he would only have one chance to get to the industry spur on the other side of the flames. As the engine approached the flames' wall, the men riding the locomotive began to jump for the ditches, which were filling up with water from the fire brigades' efforts. The locomotive lurched, bucked, reared into the air, and slowly rolled over on the engineer's side. Men jumped or were thrown clear, but Glencel Gabriel held onto the locomotive tender for dear life.

As the locomotive reared, Cass dove out the fireman's window breaking his leg. Earl Carpenter dove out of the Engineers door. Weaver, who watched in horror, told the Tacoma Daily Ledger that the big Baldwin engine made "weird screams and groans as she settled to the ground but these noises were soon drowned out by the sound of escaping steam." The engine toppled over and fell on top of Earl Carpenter, the Tacoma Railway and Power employee, killing him instantly. Inside the cab, the railroad employees were piled up on top of each other. One by one they made their way out of the resting engine. Inside the cab C. A. Wescott and W. A. Mannor bore the brunt of the accident by falling against the engine boiler. Mannor was lifted out of the locomotive with terrible burns covering his face, body, feet, and even the inside of his mouth. Wescott was not as fortunate. He died after falling on Engineer Joe Kemp, which perhaps shielded Kemp from similar injuries.

Meanwhile, rescuers like Daniel Sorenson ran to attend to Glencel Gabriel, who was screaming in agony. Beaten back by intense heat, the rescuers soaked heavy leather coats in water from the ditch, covered their heads, and ran back toward the tender. There, Gabriel was pinned with his right leg from the thigh down, his left foot and his right hand by several tons of steel and the weight of water that issued from the toppled tender. Weaver ran in and managed to free the boy's left foot, but a shovel would be necessary to free the boy's right leg. The boy begged Weaver to cut his leg off. Weaver, overcome by the heat, ran back out again. The seventeen-year-old Gabriel shrieked for help as oil pouring from the tender surrounded him. Coats soaked in water were tossed on the youngster to protect his face and back from the flames that danced about his head. Joining the rescuers were John Brown and Ralph Richardson who ran to the nearest fire hose. They demanded the firefighters train the spray on the locomotive tender while the rescue of the teen continued. Assistant Fire Chief Otto Schlegel ordered the men to retreat instead. The fire had become so

(Continued on page 9)

A 1914 Nightmare

(Continued from page 8)

intense that it burned completely through several fire hoses.

Crumpled in a heap on the ground, Cass began dragging his broken leg and calling for help. Despite suffering second-degree burns over his face, Charley Betts rounded up three other men and led the locomotive fireman out of particular peril. While John Brown and the others pleaded with Schlegel, eight valiant rescuers started a bucket brigade to keep the flames away from Gabriel. However, the water in the ditch had become unbearably hot. Each man, cloaked in water-soaked coats, took turns scurrying into the flames with either a shovel to dig the lad out or a bucket of water. Each time they ran into the flames, they fully expected to find the teen dead, but Gabriel, repeatedly begged the men to smash him in the head with the shovel. As the flames moved to within six feet of him, shopkeeper W. M. Brooks, who led the bucket brigade to comfort Gabriel, tossed another bucket of hot water on the boy. Brooks recounted, "He raised his hand and looked at me. He did not speak. I did not know whether he meant for me to leave him, as if he knew the end was near, or to come and put him out of his misery."

The teenager then fell unconscious facedown. As a last resort, rescuers used the shovel in an ill-gotten attempt to amputate the boy's leg. Within a matter of moments, the intense heat caused the engine oil to ignite. Rescuers ran for their lives as the young man died.

Merle Pickering was a coffee roaster who lived seven blocks from the blaze. Pickering was one of the men who took turns trying to save Glencel Gabriel. He was so immobilized with emotion that he was carried away from the wreckage sobbing. Weaver recounted, "I will never forget the look on the boy's face. My God! It was horrible. What pain he went through no one will ever realize." In hindsight, Weaver lamented the competence of Chief Schlegel. "Oh, if we only could have gotten that hose, I am sure I could have washed the ground away and saved his life. It seems terrible that the hose was not given to us."

The Tacoma Eastern's Lake District job was given the railroad to rush to the fire's aid. Upon arrival, the conductor and his train crew managed to pull twelve of the sixteen cars from the yard; some of which were still burning. The No. 14, in a gesture of apparent frustration, lifted her safety valve and heaved a great sigh of steam that blasted the ground with such force that the steam bleached the scorched earth surrounding it to a bright white.

John Crowell, the injured night watchman, was so consumed by the devastation that he had to be forcibly held to keep him from going back into the flaming mill site despite his injuries. The fire burned well into the night. All totaled the two mills, the Comly residence, the Comly-Kirk stables, the boiler room, the dry kiln, planing mill, four railroad cars, a score of horses and three million board-feet of timber and lumber were destroyed.

The next day, firefighters and volunteers continued mopping-up operations. Remarkably, in the blackened rubble stood the house of Walker Foster, who had started the Bismarck Lumber mill fourteen years earlier. Also spared from the flames was the Bismarck stables and yard office; all three buildings being adjacent to each other. Engine No. 14 was still too hot to handle safely and was given another day to cool sufficiently while the section crews workers laid new ties and rail beside it.

News of the fire brought the curious from all corners of the Northwest in every conveyance imaginable. Women wearing white dresses and carrying parasols against the summer sun stood out in stark contrast to the "dirt-begrimed" firefighters' blackened faces. The curious looked on in macabre wonder at the scorched locomotive, her tender, and a shovel with the handle burned away. Like buzzards picking clean a bone, scavengers pilfered little mementos of the historic fire.

Walker Foster, the owner of the Bismarck Lumber Mill, planned to rebuild. He said, "One of the worst features of the blaze is that it will throw 100 of our old employees and 50 men from the camp out of employment."

Two days after the fire, the engine was sufficiently cool to move using a wrecker on loan from the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific. Cables were strewn about its length strategically to lift the hulk back up on her wheels; likewise, the tender. Once again, the operation brought out the curious, not just children but grown men and even women with babes-in-arms. Rampant rumors told of two more bodies crushed under the weight of the tender. The spectators were a terrible nuisance: arranging and constructing for themselves temporary seating all around the worksite using building materials from the decimated mills.

At 2:45 p.m., crane operator John H. Deacon took up the slack. The hulk began to lift. A cable attached to the pilot of the locomotive shifted and cut through the front grab iron bracket like a bandsaw. The bracket flew into the nearby crowd and critically injured Emory F. Shafer, a forty-one-year-old lather who lived closeby. Shafer attempted to duck the flying object, but it was of no use; the bracket crushed the top of his skull, but,

(Continued on page 10)

A 1914 Nightmare

(Continued from page 9)

miraculously, he survived. This occurred even though 20 police officers had been called to keep (what someone estimated as) three thousand spectators away from the scene.

The crowd quickly dispersed once the lifted engine revealed no new fatalities. Superstitious railroad employees were quick to point out that engine 14 was the 13th locomotive put into service by the Tacoma Eastern. The number 14 was given to her to avoid the "hoodoo of the number 13". Other Tacoma Eastern employees mentioned that the engine had served nine trouble-free years in defense of the beloved locomotive.

Once righted, the locomotive, which cost $16,000 new, was moved on her own wheels to the Milwaukee shops on the Tacoma tide flats. The big Baldwin switch engine was soon put back into service, climbing the torturous Tacoma Eastern grade from the terminus to Bismarck and back daily.

One other sad incident relating to the fire occurred in 1921. Every summer for over ten years afterward, the remaining sawdust in the area would smolder and smoke. Small boys often played among the mill ruins. One such lad ran over a smoking sawdust pile and fell through burning his legs. Less than a month later, he was dead of blood poisoning. The Bismarck Mill fire had claimed yet another victim.

At South 58th Street and McKinley Avenue, surrounded by a high hedge, the W. B. Foster house, built-in 1903, still stands as the only surviving building of the flames of July 10, 1914.

Foster House / 58th & McKinley

Author Russell Holter is a historian for the State of WA working for the past 15 years for the Dept. of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. A graduate of UWT, Holter has published two books on local history: The Fateful Fourth, and Rails to Paradise.

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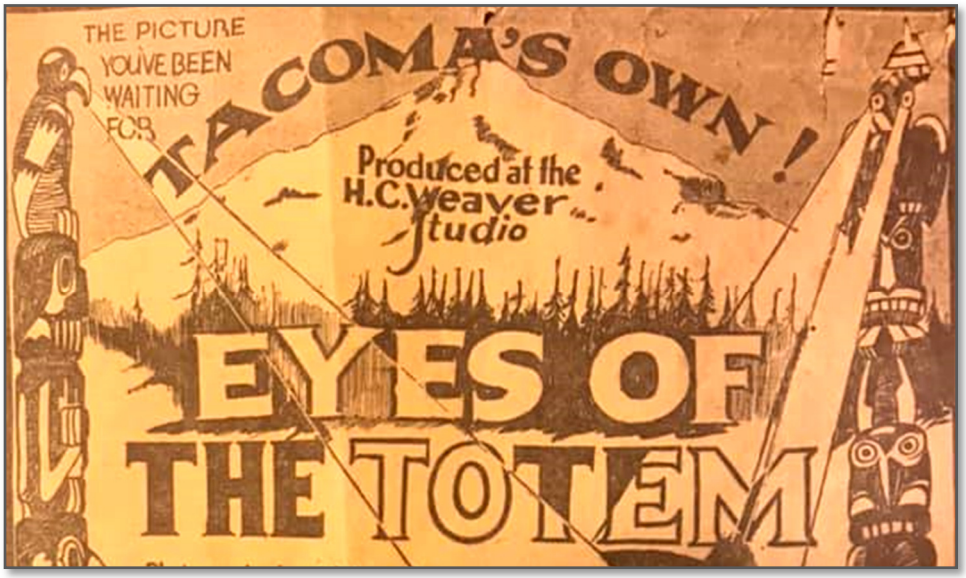

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Aviator Gustav Stromer and Jane O'Roark

(Continued from page 6)

told the court that local businessmen had loaned her money, $30,000 in the case of one Mervin J. Monnette (1847-1931), to pay for her theater training. The loans were unsecured, and the dramatic academies evidently didn't provide receipts, so Monnette, who was at the time courting a much younger woman to be his second wife, found it expedient to not remember making any such payment. O'Roark started her Washington state sojourn at Seattle's New Washington Hotel, where she was evicted for nonpayment. (A pair of her silk pajamas were later seized as partial restitution.) She then rented a house in Tacoma, installed herself and her mother, and started driving around in the borrowed Maxwell.

Flights of Fancy

Stromer was also known for living on the edge. The previous year he had made two forced landings and then survived a crash, all while attempting to fly from Tacoma to Chehalis for a Fourth of July celebration. The *Chehalis Nugget* reported that several ribs were broken in the crash, not specifying whether they belonged to Stromer or his aircraft. When he did get to Chehalis on July 5, he arrived in dramatic fashion.

"[I]t appeared at first that he had wrecked his machine as when he landed in the oat field he struck some soft ground and the machine turned completely over. He was momentarily stunned, but not injured, and climbed out before anyone arrived. The injuries to his machine as a result were a broken stay and a smashed rudder. Those were repaired, however, and Stromer made his first flight Monday evening when he circled the city twice making two beautiful flights and attracting much attention" ("Gustav Stromer"). Ten days later, he wrecked his biplane on a flight from Centralia back to Tacoma, somersaulting the plane after its undercarriage caught on a wire.

"The small crowd that had turned out at the early morning hour to watch the flight ran to where the biplane lay, a mass of wreckage, expecting to find Stromer dead, but the aviator was on his feet before help arrived. After ascertaining that the machine could not be repaired on the spot, Stromer and his manager drove to Tacoma by automobile".

A few weeks before the airmail flight, Stromer had announced plans to both fly and land his plane upside-down, using a second set of wheels he had installed on the top. He also petitioned to organize an aviation corps in the Washington state militia. Neither scheme is known to have been carried out.

By 1917, Stromer had moved his operation to Portland, Oregon, where he had a floating workshop on the Willamette River and began promoting a transcontinental flight. He and his flying partner T. H. Lipps were hoping to make the first coast-to-coast flight by a seaplane.

On Stage and in Court

O'Roark also left the area, returning to Southern California. She declared bankruptcy again in 1917, and was sued in 1920 for an unpaid loan of $981. She told the court the collateral she had offered for the loan from William M. Wantland was imaginary, put in the document to make the transaction look legitimate to his wife. He dropped the case, and she headed east to act in vaudeville under the name Jane Gray. In 1922 she was in the news and in court again, sued by a Philadelphia rug dealer for posing as a wealthy matron and defrauding him of $2,000 worth of rugs and by a New York apartment owner for stealing his furniture.

In 1932, by then a New York nightclub owner (or possibly a caterer), she switched

(Continued on page 12)

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FIRE ESCAPES

TACOMA CITY DIRECTORY (1915) 665

Strickland Geo P (Luella) craneman h 3640 So M
" Geo P jr (Jennie) mech h 3825 So L
" John S (Nellie) detective h 1315 S 40th
Strickler Edwd (Florence) cond h 3711 East I
Strieff Thos carp r 507 S 11th
Striegel Frank G auto repr 1709 Center r do
" Geo (Hedwig A) grocer 1709 Center h do
" Jos D clk r 1709 Center
Stringer Chas H clk McCormack Bros
Stromberger Albert r A-710 S 12th
Stromer Gustave W aviator h Day Island
Stromerto Maude J r 811 S 8th
Stromme John U (Minnie) painter h 2344 Hosmer
" Josephine (wid Anders) r 1609 S 19th
Stronach Harry S (Maude A) supt Lister Mnfg Co h 2410 Rosemont way
Strong Alice E tchr Whitman School r 226 St Helens av
" Bert (Arabella L) pipefitr h 4033 S

THE COZY HAT SHOP
OUT OF THE HIGH RENT

Aviator Gustav Stromer and Jane O'Roark
(Continued from page 11)

sides and sued Jessie Woolworth Donahue (1886-1971), a socialite and heiress of the Woolworth dime-store fortune, for $100,000 for defamation. Donahue's husband, J. T. Donahue (1888-1931), had died by poison the previous year as his debts mounted, and O'Roark said a portion of that money had been spent on her. O'Roark's complaint stated that Jessie Donahue had said "I was a dangerous, vicious woman of unmoral and unchaste character and that no good person should speak to me" -- Donahue responded that she had said no such thing ("Mrs. Donahue Defendant ...").

Neither O'Roark nor Stromer showed up in the aviation or mail-delivery professions again. The first regular Washington-based airmail flights, between Seattle and Victoria, B.C., began in 1920 with Eddie Hubbard (1889-1928), Boeing's first test pilot, at the controls.

Lane Morgan is the author of several books on Pacific Northwest history and natural history, as well as other topics including food, gardening, and cooking. She is also an adjunct professor of journalism at Western Washington University. Noted historian Murray Morgan was her father and they co-authored Seattle, a Pictorial History.

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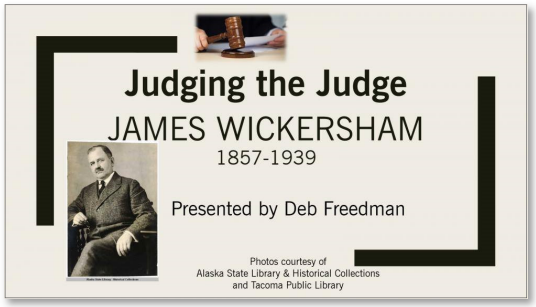
Stage Actress Jane O'Roark

History & Historic Preservation: Upcoming Programs



"Judging the Judge: James Wickersham"
ONLINE EVENT — Monday, November 9 at 7:00 p.m.
Deb Freedman, will review the life and career of Judge James Wickersham, known in Tacoma as a leader in the Anti-Chinese agitation that led to mob violence and mass expulsion in November of 1885. Wickersham went on to have a remarkable (and volatile) career in Alaska as a pioneer judge and Congressional Delegate.
Join us "live" on Facebook or YouTube to watch Deb's presentation.

Virtual Heritage Café
"Tamiko Nimura: Falling into Public History"
ONLINE EVENT — Monday, November 19 at 6:00 p.m.
Tamiko Nimura, a third-generation Japanese American and second-generation Filipina American, is a freelance writer, essayist, community journalist, and public historian. She is the author of a biography of Rosa Franklin and has written several articles for HistoryLink on Tacoma's Japanese American history.
Join us "live" on Facebook or YouTube to watch Tamiko's presentation.

Virtual Heritage Café
"Jackie Peterson: Preserving What Matters, Building A More Inclusive Practice"
ONLINE EVENT — Monday, December 17 at 6:00 p.m.
Jackie Peterson is an independent museum consultant with a focus on exhibit development, curation and writing for history museums, historic sites and other cultural institutions. She will share examples of work she has done to support and broaden the reach of preservation work.
Join us "live" on Facebook or YouTube to watch Jackie's presentation.